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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000107

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO MUGABE,S 2010 EXTENSION WIDESPREAD

REF: A) HARARE 00079 B) HARARE 00092

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

¶1. (SBU) According to Embassy interlocutors from a broad spectrum of Zimbabwe's political elite, President Robert Mugabe and his inner circle have encountered stronger than expected resistance in their attempts to extend his term to 2010, including from within Mugabe's own party. Our interlocutors, from ZANU-PF, the MDC, civil society, and academia predicted that as a result the extension was unlikely to go forward and that there would be an election or some other form of political transition in 2008. One likely scenario that several individuals mentioned involved Mugabe assuming a ceremonial presidency and the creation of a new prime minister position to head the executive branch. Others believe it is possible Mugabe will try to force ZANU-PF to back him in 2008 as its candidate for another full term in office. End Summary

The View From Inside ZANU

¶2. (C) Eddison Zvobgo, Jr., a ZANU-PF insider whose late father one of Mugabe's vice-presidents and a major figure in the party, in a January 31 meeting said that after the ZANU-PF conference in December he had initially believed Mugabe would be able to impose his will and extend his term until 2010. However, Zvobgo said the extension had created far more anxiety and turmoil within the party than he had originally expected. Many ZANU-PF members believed economic

conditions and the need for international engagement mandated a need for change at the top. Zvogbo said it was now clear to him that Mugabe would not last beyond 2008 and that the discussion was shifting to the modalities of transition.

13. (C) Zvogbo said it was unclear what kind of transition ZANU-PF decision makers, including Mugabe, favored. Various options were probably being considered. That said, he thought the most likely scenario would be a 2008 presidential election with Joice Mujuru as the ZANU-PF candidate. This would be consistent with earlier indications that Mugabe had anointed her as his successor. Moreover, she could be counted on to protect Mugabe from prosecution, something Mugabe would likely insist on in return for ceding power. This arrangement would obviously be satisfactory to Solomon Mujuru. What was less clear, admitted Zvogbo, was whether Mujuru could win a fair election. He argued, however, that the MDC was now weak and that ZANU-PF, with its electoral machinery ready, would be in a strong position to win in 2008 even with Joice Mujuru as its candidate.

14. (C) David Butau, the ZANU-PF chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Budget, Finance, and Economic Development confirmed that opposition in the party to the extension was widespread. He told us January 18 there was no question that the overwhelming majority of ZANU-PF members wanted to see Mugabe out as president in 2008. Butau hoped that there would be a ZANU-PF-led transition and that the new leadership would engage the international community.

A Former Insider's View

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15. (C) In a conversation with polecon chief January 26, Jonathan Moyo, independent MP from Tshosolotsho and until 2005 Mugabe's spokesman and a member of his inner circle, said he believed that Mugabe and his closest allies initially saw a 2010 synchronized election as a way to perpetuate his presidency and also maintain ZANU-PF in power. Moyo, who maintains close contacts within the ruling party, said the accelerating economic collapse and the unexpected depth of resistance in the party had led them to reconsider their options. Solomon Mujuru and his wife Joice were the principal sources of the resistance. According to Moyo, the Mujurus were playing hard ball and threatening to use their parliamentary support to scuttle a constitutional amendment permitting the extension were one to be proposed.

16. (C) Moyo added that neither Mugabe and his inner circle, nor his would-be successors, the Mujurus, would want an election in 2008 given the state of the economy. Instead, he thought it likely they would agree to amend the constitution to create a ceremonial presidency for Mugabe (which would protect him from prosecution) and to create a new prime minister position, which would exercise most executive authority. The Mujurus would obviously want someone from their own camp, either Joice Mujuru or former Finance Minister Simba Makoni, as prime minister. Under this scenario, elections would be delayed at least until 2010, theoretically giving ZANU-PF time to negotiate with the international community and begin rehabilitating the economy.

The MDC Perspective

17. (C) MDC anti-Senate faction leader Morgan Tsvangirai also told the Ambassador on January 30 (Ref A) that an extension of Mugabe's term was proving unpopular within ZANU-PF. There was opposition in eight out of ten provinces, as well as in both the Mnangagwa and Mujuru factions. Given this

opposition, Tsvingirai believed Mugabe would not risk a constitutional amendment to extend his term and the most likely scenario was an election in 2008, with Mugabe standing once more as the ZANU-PF candidate. However, given the state of the economy, Tsvangirai (like Moyo) said Mugabe and the Mujurus might agree to postpone elections by establishing a ceremonial presidency with a prime minister heading the executive branch.

¶8. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador on February 1 (Ref B), MDC pro-Senate faction leader Arthur Mutambara said he believed Solomon Mujuru's opposition to an extension of Mugabe's term and a presidential election in 2010 had scuttled this proposal. Mutambara thought that Mugabe would be ZANU-PF's candidate in a 2008 election. However, Mugabe could be beaten and it would be up to the democratic opposition to unite around a single candidate who could provide a strong challenge.

Civil Society and Academia Weigh In

¶9. (C) National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) president Lovemore Madhuku told us January 24 that he and most of his civil society colleagues believed that ZANU-PF was preparing

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to abandon the extension of the president's term. Madhuku said an extension of the term and the postponement of elections would be unpopular and would be viewed internally and outside of Zimbabwe as a constitutional abuse. Madhuku speculated that the ruling party's internal divisions along with the economic situation, would seriously weaken ZANU-PF regardless of whether elections were held in 2008 or 2010.

¶10. (C) University of Zimbabwe political scientist Eldred Masununguru told us that going into the December ZANU-PF conference only Harare and Mashonaland East provinces were against 2010 synchronization. However, since the conference, the Mujurus has been exerting pressure on provincial committees. Masununguru believed that all provinces with the exceptions of Masvingo, Mashonaland West, and Mashonaland Central have rallied to Mujuru and want Mugabe out in 2008.

Comment

¶11. (C) All of our interlocutors without exception agreed that the accelerated economic deterioration and Mugabe's efforts to postpone scheduled 2008 presidential elections have catalyzed opposition to an extension of his rule, including most notably within his own party. The ground has shifted under Mugabe, perhaps decisively, and in a septel we will offer our analysis of what this means for the Mugabe regime and for the country it has brought to the brink of ruin.

DELL